

Governance Committee

28 June 2021

Future Catering Provision for Councillors

Report by Director of Law and Assurance

Electoral division: Not applicable

Summary

As the staff canteen on the County Hall campus has closed, consideration has been given to whether alternative catering arrangements should be made for member meetings in future, when public health restrictions can be relaxed.

Recommendation

- (1) That hot drinks continue to be made available to members through the existing coffee machines; and
 - (2) That sandwich lunches be provided on County Council meeting days and for other meetings when agreed by the Head of Democratic Services in consultation with that meeting's chairman.
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Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 The Governance Committee was notified in January 2021 that the Martlets Restaurant at the County Hall campus is likely to be closed as part of budget savings (to be confirmed as part of the budget on 12 February). Members discussed whether any catering should be resumed for members when in-person meetings take place again, when it is safe enough to do so.
- 1.2 A survey of all members was undertaken in February 2021 to ask for their opinion about whether catering should be resumed and if so, what level of catering should be provided. The results are attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.3 As Martlets will no longer be able to offer catering, Democratic Services has investigated possible options, including continuing the use of coffee machines at County Hall and obtaining lunches from an external caterer. Alternatively, members could arrange their own catering through bringing refreshments with them or purchasing them from the cafes in Chichester city centre.

2 Proposal details

- 2.1 Based on the results of the member survey, the proposal is that both smaller coffee machines will be based in the Members' Office in the reception area,

available for members only. Members may also wish to continue to bring their own refreshments. The third coffee machine will remain in its plumbed-in position in the Cabinet Office. Water will be provided again at meetings when current public health restrictions can be relaxed.

- 2.2 It is proposed that sandwich lunches will be provided by an external caterer in liaison with the Edes House events management team. This will be provided on Council day and for any other meetings that are expected to last most of the day. The Governance Committee is asked to consider whether the sandwich lunch should continue to be provided in Edes House on Council Day, or whether it should be moved to committee rooms 1 and 2, to allow more usage of Edes House for weddings and other income-generating events.
- 2.3 It is suggested that the Head of Democratic Services should agree to the booking of a lunch for any meeting other than full Council, on the recommendation of that meeting's chairman.

3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 3.1 Members were asked whether the provision of catering should cease altogether. Many members felt that lunch provision helped with networking and noted that if members had to get their own lunches this might mean that break times would need to be extended, constraining business time at meetings.

4 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 Other County Councils in South East England were consulted on what level of catering is provided for members at their councils. Their responses are set out below.

| County Council | Provision |
|-----------------------|--|
| East Sussex | Only provide tea, coffee and tap water at meetings. No lunches are provided apart from exceptional circumstances. Breaks are factored into/between meetings to enable members to get lunch/bring their own. Drinks vending machines are provided. |
| Essex | Only provide hot drinks in the members' area. Hot lunch five times a year at full Council meetings, but members have to deduct the costs from their allowances. Only water is provided in most meetings. |
| Hampshire | Only provide tea, coffee and tap water at meetings. Lunches are provided only in exceptional circumstances or for multi-agency meetings being hosted and would consist of a finger-buffet/light refreshments. On full Council days, members make their own lunch arrangements. |
| Surrey | Only provide water for member meetings. A buffet lunch is provided for full Council meetings, the cost of which is met from members' subsistence. |

5 Finance

- 5.1 The current budget for member catering is £25,000 per annum. This covers the costs of tea and coffee at meetings, plus lunches for meetings that go significantly into the afternoon. This included the hot two-course lunch on Council day and refreshment at member days and training events.
- 5.2 One coffee machine is fully owned by Democratic Services, the other two are leased at the cost of approximately £180 a year. Supplies for the coffee machines currently cost around £370 per year, but this figure could rise if the machines are used more because of a lack of fresh tea and coffee.
- 5.3 External caterers have indicated that a sandwich lunch with fruit could be provided for around £5 per person. This would be provided for members only and when a meeting going well into the afternoon is deemed to be necessary by the Head of Democratic Services, in consultation with the Committee's chairman.

6 Risk implications and mitigations

| Risk | Mitigating Action (in place or planned) |
|---|---|
| Reputational risks if the County Council continues to provide more than other Councils do. | The reduced catering arrangements proposed should mitigate this risk. |
| Lack of catering provision may lead to worsening attendance or members needing longer lunch breaks, reducing the amount of time for committee business. | The reduced catering arrangements proposed should mitigate this risk. |

7 Policy alignment and compliance

- 7.1 Not applicable.

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Background papers

None